The Future of Small Towns: challenges and opportunities

Chris Wade, CEO AMT Towns Alive

Promoting Vibrant and Viable Small Towns

www.towns.org.uk
Influencing your Town’s Trajectory

Leadership & Policy

Diversity of Issues and Places

Charting Change

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Creating Effective Local Leadership through:

Self-Reliant Practices
• Understanding town economies beyond the high street or seafront
• Creating affordable housing solutions
• Delivering innovative public services

Strategic Support
• Strengthening local leadership and capacity
• Joining-up settlements and policies
• Managing change through community-led planning

[1] Small Towns at the Centre of a Rural Revival; Scottish Parliament Rural Policy CPG, June 2012.
Locally-led development... government facilitation

“The challenge now is to help all rural communities successfully take part in networked development, whatever their existing local capacities and resources. This will require action from national, devolved and local government on two levels:

• Investment in capacity building in communities to support networked action at a local level;

• Rural proofing of national, devolved and local policies to address persistent patterns of structural differentiation.”
Leadership & Policy

Diversity of Issues and Places

Charting Change
“A great many people work daily for the benefit of town centres. The Scottish Government is just one key player in securing their future and we are determined to play our part in supporting them. This plan should be seen as a living document that can adapt to change, just as towns must adapt to ever changing circumstances.”

- Town Centre Living
- Vibrant Local Economies
- Enterprising Communities
- Accessible Public Services
- Digital Towns
- Pro-active Planning

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Leadership:
• Public sector joined-up action
• Integrated, place-based approach through community planning partnerships

Sustainability:
• Maintenance of public services
• Pivotal role of schools and education
• Innovative small businesses
• Cultural activities and attractive environment

Knowledge and Networking:
• Understand urban and rural policy links
• Promote national interest and partnerships
Identifying Different Types of Towns

Small Towns
- Middle Aged, Managerial Jobs
- Single Persons, Routine Jobs
- Older Persons, Leisure Jobs
- Young Families, Admin Jobs
- Professionals, Commuting
- Disadvantages
- Routine Jobs, Agric/Manufg.
- Age Mix, Professional

Urban Areas
- > 750,000
- 250,000 - 750,000

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Potential ‘Drivers’ for Change

- An aging population
- Climate change
- Further developments in technology
- Young adults educated in cities
- The decline in agriculture reversing itself
- Some people continuing to be more disadvantaged than others
- Economic & environmental migrants
- Towns & cities becoming more dependent on each other
Dormitory town
Weak planning control
New affordable housing on green field sites
Little investment in public transport
Plenty of service jobs attracting temporary, mobile work force
Separate neighbourhoods with little cohesion and involvement
New style of settlement built around areas of research
Low carbon footprint
Great range of housing people with right skills
Good investment in public transport
Investment in knowledge-based industries
Good investment in health facilities.
Policy and delivery: The highlighted drivers for change can all be influenced by policy makers and local delivery bodies.

Town and country planning: In order for some of the scenarios to develop, the study suggests that there will need to be policies that both contain development and allow innovation.

Economy: It is proposed that investment will increasingly need to be dictated by the vulnerability of settlements to climate change and other drivers.

Participative democracy: “The more local people want to live in a participative democracy, the better the chances they will have of contributing to the potential futures that they face”.

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Monitoring Change in Town Centre Economy

- **Standardised Indicators of Function**
  - Number of commercial units;
  - Retail mix

- **Capturing Perceptions & Issues**
  - Business perceptions; Shoppers’ perceptions;

- **Comparing Change over Time & Place**
  - Business & car park occupancy rates;
  - Footfall; Business confidence

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Benchmarking+ Barrhead Pilot

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Capturing full flavour of Scotland’s Towns

Measuring breadth & depth:
- Cultural & community function
- Built heritage
- Economic diversity
- Local leadership & delivery

Practical to measure & meaningful to compare
- Offers base-line and annual review for towns
- Helps monitor and manage local delivery
- Charts national trends and policy challenges
Changing Places: What’s in a Word?

- Vulnerability
- Sustainability /Resilience
  - adaptability; capacity; self-reliance; enterprise; innovation

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## Tracking Local Capital Development

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Delivering local leadership & national policy through 
*Networked Development*

Understanding diversity of place & issues from local to national levels

Monitoring and managing local change & national trends

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